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ABSTRACT

The educational system is wracked by three crises: the crisis of efficiency and support; the crisis of relevance and control; and the crisis of race and class. Concerning the first, budgeteers and law makers will soon want answers about the efficiency of the present distribution of educational tasks and levels, new programs, and the use of new media. Students tend to be suspicious of the preoccupation with "efficiency and support" and are asking that education justify itself in terms of its relevance to their growth as individuals and to the transformation of American society and culture. The third crisis is caused by black and other minority group students who are questioning both the process of university operations and its course of studies. To meet these crises, it is important to seek a greater variety of means to meet more clearly stated ends. This means asking questions about the why's and how's of learning. (AF)

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Now that they are more or less in hand, it will soon be clear that a better title for these remarks would have been, "How Strait the Jacket?" But the imperatives of public relations lead chronically to the premature christening of speeches not yet born or even conceived. One is forced to float a title in midair, and later to try to give a speech under it, like the horse of a medieval knight, suspended in his armor before the tournament. My title today is deceptive if it suggests a direct and technical inquiry into the rites of academic passage most suited to the established school and college scenes. For that, I have not even a modicum of your expertness. It is not deceptive if it suggests a discussion of some prospective changes in those scenes which may reshape the work of those directly and technically concerned with problems of assessment and admissions.

I was last moved to such a discussion at a colloquium of foreign educators in July, where I found that remarks addressed to an assigned title are not easily produced either. I was asked to report to the colloquium on recent university developments in fast-developing countries. In order to respond, I had to construe the term "fast-developing" as in hurricane Camille. For what has been going on in American higher education during the last five years is not so much a staged and linear evolution as a convulsive ordeal. I found myself distinguishing no fewer than three crises in those five years, which, since none of them had gone away, had resulted in a most improbable mixture of acute indigestion, malnutrition, and profound self-doubt. The time density with which these crises have seized the educational system may be measured by the wish Messrs. Riesman and Jencks have expressed recently, that they hadn't used up the word "revolution" in the title of their recent book but had saved it for what is going on now.

The three spasms which are wracking the educational system may be distinguished under the shorthand titles: the crisis of efficiency and support, the crisis of relevance and control, and the crisis of race and class. These seizures are not only distinct, but it is quite possible that success in mitigating one of them may intensify the others. Efficiency and support, which are the preoccupation of managers, budgeteers and legislators, may be strengthened in ways which exacerbate the issues of relevance and control which restive white students are stressing. In turn, reducing the disabilities of race and class which students from the black ghettos are decrying has already aggravated the problem of efficiency and support.

One thing is clear now. Questions are being asked about American education as a system of means and ends which are drastic, in many cases overdue, and if the pressure keeps up, even likely to be answered over the next ten years. I will first divide these questions in accordance with their origins and then try to suggest an approach to answering them in positive and compatible ways.

Questions concerning the crisis of efficiency and support have been coming thick and fast from budgeteers and law-makers faced with what appears to be an endless growth in all of the principal categories of educational cost. A year ago, at a meeting of American, British and Canadian educators, I attempted to formulate some

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of the questions about the efficiency of the present system which it may be requested to answer as it lays claim to a larger share of the tax revenues of the nation. Developments since that time have convinced me that answering these questions is, indeed, urgent business, and so I repeat them now:

1. The educational system appears to be conducted at three levels--school, college and university. Do these levels have distinct ends and, if so, can these ends be operationally defined in terms of the competences and knowledge students are expected to acquire, the preparation of staff for each level, and the incentives and rewards offered for effective contributions?

2. If most students are now going to extend their education beyond secondary school, how should this new prospect affect the content and length of schooling?

If we could say what schooling is supposed to accomplish and what is best assigned to the colleges or other post-secondary agencies, we could then decide how much time and money to invest in the school system. Instead, we begin by assuming twelve nine-month years, and of course schooling, obeying Parkinson's first law, "expands to fill the time available."

3. If the abilities, incentives, and learning styles of students vary widely, why are most of them taught in the same way over the same period of time?

4. Will increased numbers enter higher education out of intellectual hunger, or because more and more employment has been predicated upon a bachelor's or more advanced degree? If the latter, can educators devise measures of aptitude, interest, and acquired competence which would nerve employers to engage individuals as individuals, without fixed prerequisites embodied in a degree?

5. If most professors do not, in fact, produce research and if the identities of most of those who can are known, why are the "teaching load" and the "career line" so nearly the same for most professors?

6. How much longer can the "productivity" of professors, in the economically important sense of students taught per professor, continue to decline as the cost of instruction goes up?

This is not to suggest that recent faculty gains be rolled back to some earlier point, but that the conventional deployment of faculty time be reviewed and revised, to make very much more selective use of that expensive commodity.

7. If most college students do not, in fact, become scholars or scientists, why entrust them to research departments for most of their college course?

The persistence of the single-subject department as the sole point of professional attachment for most college professors has made it unnecessarily difficult to sustain beyond their salad years new and different courses for first-year college students or to develop such interdepartmental "concentrations" as human biology, urban studies, and Afro-American history and culture.

8. Are there legitimate economies to be found in the thorough-going use of new media as substitutes for faculty instruction in connection with expository and rote

teaching and learning tasks? Have these tasks been dissected carefully with such economies in view?

The cost of computer assisted instruction per student contact hour is apparently about to drop sharply, perhaps from a low of \$2.00 to a low of 38 cents. But there is as yet little prospect that "CAI" will actually replace live teaching and thus save money as well as provide instruction. Such is the American passion for improving the product, that what starts out as a substitute ends as an additive.

9. Why is so little known about the actual results secured by various educational programs and why do results, when they are known, effect so little change?

10. Who acts and speaks for education in response to such questions as these?

There is nothing novel about these questions. What is new is that educators may now be forced to answer them. For if deficits go on as they have, some-day soon one of the hard-pressed States of the Union (i.e., any one of the fifty), faced with another expansion of its total expenditures for education, may decide to question the underlying premises, rather than the details, of that expenditure. The planners and budgeteers of such a daring State will find themselves peering back in puzzlement through the mists of time. And they will soon conclude that the present distribution of educational tasks and levels is a product of unexamined accretion over a long period of time. This does not make it wrong, of course. In fact, one thing in favor of any actual system is that, since it exists, at least we know that it is possible. But it is also true that "waste, water, and duplication" have been found repeatedly at several levels of the system and that differently structured subsystems have been frequently and successfully tried out on a local basis. To the brave band which undertakes such an inquiry, I offer two rules of thumb: (1) avoid one- and two-year academic programs like the plague; (2) in existing programs which are now four years or more in length, look for at least one year of waste.

The questions of critical students concerning the relevance and control of the educational system are harder to list but no less insistent. Suspicious of recent preoccupations with efficiency and support, such students are asking education to justify itself in terms of its relevance to their growth as individual persons and to the transformation of American society and culture. They want education to be pure but not detached, involved in the world but not subserving worldly ends. And they are asking to be entrusted with a large measure of responsibility for their own learning and for the shaping of the conditions under which it is carried on. In making these claims and charges, students have often alarmed and angered their elders. Their own first attempts to do what they say should be done were in many cases shallow and abortive. Yet, during the last year, solid and stimulating contributions to educational improvement were made by students in several universities, and there are encouraging signs that many universities and colleges are beginning to form the institutional habit of engaging students, faculty, and academic administrators in joint deliberations more searching than the latter two groups have been accustomed to carry on by themselves.

Finally, and most abruptly, has come the crisis of race and class. Overnight beachheads of black students from the inner city have been established in "predominantly white" colleges. These students no sooner landed in their unfamiliar

surroundings than they brought into serious question both the process by which they reached shore and the "processing" awaiting them there at the hands of the natives. They have been quick to charge that the present procedures of admission and the present course of study may be relevant to each other, but that neither is relevant to them or to the thousands of ghetto students they left behind. There is a degree of truth in this charge. The fact, for example, that only seven percent of post-high school students come from fourth quartile income families, and the fact that most college students will "complete" their educations quite ignorant of the history and social experience of Afro-Americans, make it easy to conclude that our present educational system, huge and ambitious as it undoubtedly is, tends to perpetuate and even exacerbate those disabilities of race and class which it had been thought to relieve.

Given this crowd of questions, demands, and challenges, how can the responses of educators hope to be adequate to them? I can only suggest an approach today and illustrate it at a few points, trusting to a mixture of prophecy and prescription, rather than reasoned demonstration, to do the work of persuasion.

Put succinctly and platitudinously, that approach is to seek a greater variety of means to more clearly stated ends. The received indictment of the American educational system is that its aims are unclear and its means already miscellaneous to a fault. But most of this alleged variety of means is superficial and only coarsely reflective of educational needs. Indeed, the system enters its present time of trial with full quotas of unexamined routines and unexplored options. It largely lacks those fine-grained gradients of educational roles and methods which a free and active response to present pressures and opportunities might yield.

As they remind us daily, students come first. Suppose, now, that the actual variety among students comes to be clearly recognized by our colleges and that this variety comes actually to be reflected in the forms of learning and teaching made available to them. One can foresee that students will be distributed far more widely than now in respect of the place where they learn, which may not be a campus at all, or may be a campus "without walls"; the rate at which they are expected to complete their college work, which may vary from two years to five or six; the manner or style of their learning, which may combine in many new ways action and theory, production and analysis, performance and appreciation, feeling and thought, work and study; the amount and kind of instruction they require, from daily drill to the terminal examination of "private candidates"; and the gradient of community roles and responsibilities which students will enjoy from entry, through tutoring of younger students, to service on college committees, to--who knows?--election to the Board of Trustees as an imminent graduate.

Obviously, the arsenals of means employed by different colleges will differ in respect of the mixtures of roles and methods they find most suitable at a given time. Nevertheless, a greater variety than at present in the means of learning will be required within each college, not only because intelligent but poorly prepared students from fourth quartile families will be accepted and nurtured in colleges previously more homogeneous, but because even present student bodies are crowded too closely in the Procrustean bed of established programs and too many students are smothering there or falling "out the side."

To vary the means of learning in these drastic ways is above all to re-deploy

and supplement the time and effort of the faculty in new ways and new mixtures. One can foresee, in a given college, a range of faculty activity extending from daily close-order instruction of students of good native wit who yet lack the grammar of collegiate study to fortnightly seminar contact with most students, supplemented by regularly scheduled student learning groups, well-prepared syllabi designed to reduce sharply the dependence of learners on classes and courses, weekly college-wide lectures and panels open to any student interested in their subjects, and such exploitation of the "new media" as will further student initiative in their use and actually replace costly faculty time.

One can also hope for a more candid and positive facing of the fact that professors vary widely in the kinds of contributions they may be expected to make to teaching at different levels and of different kinds, to the production of new knowledge through original research, to the interpretation of knowledge and ideas, and to the enlightenment of their communities as citizen-intellectuals. (A case in point is the department chairman who was heard to say that the Ph.D. thesis must be a work of original research because, he said, "Three-fourths of our students will never produce another.") The prevailing fiction that all of these contributions should be made by the same professors, or the crippling assumption that teachers, interpreters, and citizen-intellectuals are only researchers manqué, should be replaced by staffing policies which bring about that particular faculty texture which a given college or university decides that it requires. The deliberate use of multiple criteria for advancement in the attempt to maintain such a mixture of kinds of faculty contributions will complicate the lives of deans, but it should also invigorate the enterprise.

Clearly, a learning community which provides this degree of variation in bringing learning about will scandalize more than its registrar unless it finds ways to define the ends "toward which the whole creation moves" and to measure the promise and progress of learners at various points along their different routes.

Here is where examinations acquire a new importance. More versatile and sensitive instruments must be designed to assess the level of knowledge, thought, taste, and social perception attained at the time of entry into college, and thus provide colleges with the basis for determining the place, pace, and mode of learning most appropriate for each entrant. For each college, also, measures of terminal competence will be needed which provide an operational definition of what that college's degree means.

I am aware that both admissions and course examinations are under heavy current attack from students as constrictive and illiberal in their effects on both admissions and learning. I believe that these strictures do apply to admissions examinations which simply minimize risks or justify hauteur by the receiving college. They apply, also, to achievement examinations which marry the student to a single mode of learning (most frequently the unit course-for-credit). But when examinations are used to help colleges "make learning happen" for a wider range of students and to enable students to exhibit in various ways the culminating quality of their learning in college, they can be a liberating and clarifying influence on the entire collegiate enterprise. Nothing sharpens the definition of educational ends more inescapably than attempting to construct measures of the essential outcomes to be sought through a course of study, just as nothing is better designed to spare educators the need to be clear than the present stacking-up of unit courses until four years have safely passed. After all, the reason why all roads led to Rome was that those who built the roads knew where Rome was and wanted travellers to get there.